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ABSTRACT

The Salvation Army Brunswick (Australia) Job Placement and Training (JPET) project was first established as a recreational project for connecting workers with young people, but it grew to address the educational needs of at-risk youth. Staff working in the program follow a non-conflict, adult education model, emphasizing the development of a cooperative, supportive environment where students establish their own learning goals and are expected to take responsibility and make decisions regarding their learning, attendance, participation, and progress in the program. The curriculum allows the flexibility to incorporate interest-based topics and varied content. Competency-based assessment allows students to have existing skills recognized and to be assessed on their own timetable. Students are granted much-coveted certificates upon completion of the program. Successful programs have incorporated cooking, arts, crafts, and music and running a youth company selling herb garden kits. (KC)

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# Moving the Margins: Successful Programs for Marginalised Youth.

Julie McClimont

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These young people's educational experiences have often been built up over years and years of bad school incidents, unsympathetic school staff, unsupportive families and a general feeling of hopelessness and helplessness. Parents have often had negative school experiences themselves and thus may be less likely to have encouraged or valued a good education for their children.

We can't necessarily expect to change such behaviours, or to make a meaningful difference, in an eight-week course. Be realistic about what is achievable, but don't be pessimistic either - you have an opportunity to put in place some small steps forward.

Those who don't wish to be there are the greatest challenge for you. Take it on. It may be frustrating, it might seem a waste of time and you may not see the fruits of your efforts in the short time available to you. On the other hand, it may offer you the most rewarding experience you ever have as an educator. If you can make the slightest inkling of difference in terms of their impressions of education and their perceptions of educators, then you have done your part in making their ongoing education experiences that much more meaningful.

If the challenge starts to frustrate you, it may help to bear in mind the words of adolescent health expert Michael Resnick: "Young people are resources to be developed, not problems to be solved...never, ever give up on a young person."

*Thanks to Karen Field for her assistance with this article.*

1 Dr John Court, Adolescent Physician, Centre for Adolescent Health, Melbourne.

2 Fuller, A. (1998) *From Surviving to Thriving – Promoting Mental Health in Young People*. ACER Press: Melbourne.

3 Resnick, M., Harris, L. & Blum, R. (1993) 'The impact of caring and connectedness on adolescent health and wellbeing' *Journal of Pediatric Child Health* Vol. 29S3-S9.

4 Bond, L., Thomas, L., Toumbourou, J., Patton, G. & Catalano, R. (2000) Improving the Lives of Young Victorians in Our Community: a survey of risk and resilience factors. Melbourne: Centre for Adolescent Health.

# Moving the Margins – successful programs for marginalised youth

*By **Julie McClimont**, Education Coordinator, The Salvation Army, Brunswick JPET Program*

The Federal Government's introduction of 'Mutual Obligation' for benefit recipients has led to a huge influx of marginalised young people into the ACE sector. Whilst I have heard stories of classes consisting of a room full of adults who listen, engage, bring you cakes and want to learn from you, my experience in the ACE sector has been very different. I have been working with youth at risk. However, I consider myself to have an extremely rewarding and fulfilling job, because of my opportunity to encourage and nurture these young people and then watch their confidence grow and skills develop. After a brief overview of the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT) Job Placement and Training (JPET) education program I am involved in, I would like to share some ideas for working with youth in the ACE sector.

## BACKGROUND

When the Salvation Army Brunswick JPET was first established, its program was largely recreational and used as a means of connecting workers with young people. After connections were made, JPET workers attempted to re-engage young people in work education and training. However, it was realised that they were not ready for such pathways.

JPET services a particularly disadvantaged sector of the labour market.

# News from the Melbourne Museum

***Margaret Griffith**, Program Coordinator, Public Activity Programs Melbourne Museum, Carlton Gardens, Nicholson Street, Melbourne.*

Melbourne Museum has now opened, and it's a great resource for adult education.

The Australia Gallery, Bunjilaka (the Aboriginal Gallery), the Pacific Gallery, parts of the Children's Museum, Body Art, and all the public spaces are alive with great exhibitions and a lively program of performances and activities. Wednesdays to Saturdays during daylight saving, Melbourne Museum is open until 9.00 pm.

As all galleries are not yet open, admission is half price until March 9 2001. Half price admission for both school and adult students in groups is $3.30. (Body Art is separately ticketed - $8, conc $6). Book your group in by phoning 1300 130 152.

As an educator, you are welcome to come to the Museum free of charge to plan your group's visit. At the ticket desk, simply present a sheet of your organisation's letterhead with a note from your manager/prinicipal/coordinator explaining who you are and what classes you take.

A series of Professional Development sessions is currently being planned. Watch the ARIS publications for details.

For more information on adult education programs at Melbourne Museum contact Geraldine Zeccola, tel 8341 7208, and Margaret Griffith 8341 7150.

To qualify for JPET assistance a young person needs to fall into one of the following categories: homelessness, at risk of homelessness, state-wardship or exiting state-wardship, juvenile justice client or refugee. It is not uncommon for our students to fall into a number of these categories. JPET clients also frequently present with a range of other social welfare issues such as; physical or sexual abuse, drug and alcohol issues, anger-management problems, dysfunctional family backgrounds, lack of social skills and mental health issues.

In recognition of the social, welfare and educational issues of JPET clients, a small part time educational program was established by JPET in early 1999. In second semester 1999, this was developed into a collaboration between NMIT (Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE) and the Salvation Army Brunswick JPET program, utilising Profile Funding allocated by PETE. JPET clients are now offered full-time, off campus enrolment at NMIT, in the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA).

*Selling herb garden kits.*

The program is delivered out of The Salvation Army Brunswick Community Centre, a small non-institutional venue, where the JPET program is also located. A teacher is employed by NMIT to run the CGEA program. My time as the JPET worker is divided between providing support for the welfare/employment needs of the students and team teaching with the NMIT teacher.

Lack of educational attainment is a key problem limiting young unemployed people's movement into the permanent workforce. Large numbers of JPET clients are early school leavers, many with self-identified literacy issues. Re-entry into education/training appears to be the most appropriate pathway. However, given their social and welfare difficulties, most JPET participants present as being unable to maintain formal studies in high school, TAFE or training. Furthermore, in general they are not work ready.

The experience of JPET is that this client group also often experiences high levels of alienation, isolation and conflict with adults and institutions of our society. As such, one of the goals of the program is to establish links with support and social networks and to positively reintegrate the participants into an educational and community setting.

The program recognises that students enrol for a variety of reasons and that these are not always educational. The majority of our students are required to attend some form of registered training in order to satisfy their mutual obligation requirements and often their educational and career goals are unclear and they lack consistent motivation. For many students learning barriers such as negative schooling experiences, school exclusion, gaps in learning and poor concentration, inhibit their ability to study effectively. Due to these issues, it is important that progress be measured in terms of increasing participation, building confidence, developing social skills, group skills, communication skills and that there is a focus on the experience of success upon completion of tasks.

*Picnic at Hanging Rock.*

Staff working in the program follow a non-conflict, adult education model. This emphasises the development of a cooperative, supportive environment where students establish their own learning goals and therefore are expected to take responsibility and make decisions regarding their learning, attendance, participation and progress in the program. Removal of the traditional teacher/student relationship diminishes much of the conflict these young people had previously experienced in the secondary system.

## SO WHY USE CGEA?

The CGEA curriculum allows the flexibility to incorporate interest based topics and varied content. Students are encouraged to have significant input into the selection of the topics and materials used, so it is not unusual for each of our students to be working on entirely different subjects and tasks at the same time. When students negotiate their own content they are taking a degree of responsibility for their learning and are more likely to be motivated and engaged.

Using the CGEA's competency-based assessment, students are able to have existing skills recognised and to undertake assessment when they choose to do so. Many of our students have gone through their schooling experience without receiving certificates or positive feedback, so working towards obtaining a certificate is a major incentive. When two of our students finished Certificate I last year, their residential unit considered it such a huge achievement, they hired a limousine for the girls to travel in to their NMIT graduation ceremony. Both girls went out during the day and had their hair done and turned up immaculately dressed in suits. After the ceremony, they had a succession of beaming photos taken with a couple of extremely proud teachers and most importantly..... their certificates.

Competency-based assessment allows students to follow their progress. Each student has a page with the list of competencies they are required to complete in order to achieve their Certificate. We have found this to be particularly successful for students who have set themselves goals or time-lines. For example, we were working with a young woman who was expecting a baby and her goal was to finish Certificate II before she became a full-time mother. 'Ticking' assessment tasks off

gives students a sense of achievement and a feeling of some control over their progress.

Competency-based assessment is particularly important for our students who are transitory, or need to leave the program for a duration of time due to significant issues in their life. The CGEA allows students to return to the program and not have to repeat work. We have one young woman who has excellent skills, but frequent periods when she uses drugs and alcohol. She may be away from the program for a couple of months at a time. When she returns, however, she simply begins again from where she left off.

## SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

Obtaining new and interesting ideas for my program are my main goals whenever I attend a professional development day, read an article or look through a magazine. The following is a brief overview of some of the programs we have delivered under the CGEA and found to be successful. Hopefully they will provide you with ideas for the young people you are working with.

Early this year we were approached by Moreland City Council's Youth Services Unit who were interested in running a Young Achievement Australia Program for local unemployed young and early school leavers. Young Achievement Australia is a national non-profit organisation sponsored by the small business sector, attempting to develop young people's awareness of business through practical hands on experience.

The aim of the program was to provide our students with an opportunity to acquire a range of personal skills such as negotiation, decision making, creativity, communication and risk-taking. It was expected that students would also develop professional skills including budgeting and money management and a primary understanding of small business. However, we also saw this as the perfect opportunity to deliver all four CGEA modules without students even realising they were doing 'work'.

Some of the activities students undertook included: negotiating a company name, selling shares, keeping minutes, maintaining financial records, participating in formal business meetings, electing executive positions, developing a product proposal, surveying potential customers, writing a business report, booking stalls at shopping centres, demonstrating our product at meetings, designing a marketing concept, ordering and purchasing supplies and manufacturing the product.

The students decided to make and sell herb garden kits. The kit consisted of three pots, choice of seeds, an ancient herbal remedy booklet and soil, all packaged in a hessian bag. We are almost in the process of liquidating our company and it looks at if our shareholders may even get their investment back.

All of our students completed their General Curriculum Options module, whilst the majority completed their Oral Communication module and a number of Reading and Writing competencies. Although this program has required an enormous amount of time from both students and staff, huge shifts in personal development, confidence and knowledge have taken place.

We have also used our students love of cooking (and eating) in our programs with considerable success. We are fortunate as our centre has an industrial kitchen. To ensure motivation, we get the students to choose the recipes. We then multiply the recipes before we read through the ingredients, make a shopping list and estimate costs. Then we go shopping and use our numeracy skills to compare prices, weigh fruit and vegies and order from the deli. Finally we read through the recipes and prepare delicious meals whilst learning new culinary skills. I am always surprised by the number of young people who do not know how to follow the direction of a recipe and instead mix all the ingredients together. As many of our young people live independently we also discuss nutrition and health and safety issues.

Our students are encouraged to plan and undertake the cooking for special events held at the centre. Earlier this year we went for a trip to Hanging Rock and a couple of our students organised the food. They made a selection of slices and salads and bought a range of meat to barbecue after surveying staff and students on their eating habits. Students have also catered for the end of year break-up and a meal for sixty people from local rooming houses.

Art and craft is also popular with our students. Our art cupboard holds a range of materials to tempt and activate young people's creativity. Sewing is popular and an excellent way for students to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Following a pattern for boxer shorts is a fun form of reading for practical purposes. Creating a product provides a sense of achievement and makes the learning concrete.

We have also timetabled two music sessions each week into our program. This initiative has been particularly important for engaging a couple of young men who were reluctant to participate in any program due to mental health issues and chronic drug use. These young men are actually extremely creative and work together with the teacher to write their own music and lyrics. They have been slowly encouraged to take part in other aspects of the program as well.

Many of the young people I work with say their ultimate goal is to find work and the reason they return to study is to improve their chances of obtaining employment. I explain how they can concurrently job search and complete literacy tasks, thus progressing through the CGEA whilst they look for work. As well as developing their literacy skills they will be learning to job search and hopefully take this on in a more independent manner.

Young people without significant adults require support in many areas of their lives, especially when dealing with confusing and convoluted literature. We are continually confronted with Centrelink letters, TAC compensation forms and threatening mobile phone bills. Whilst it may be difficult to inspire our students to complete various tasks, the threat of a Centrelink breach will immediately inspire action and a written response, especially when supported. If a task has meaning and urgency, students are more likely to be engaged.

As you will gather from the examples given our program is flexible, responsive and attempts to provide students with hands-on learning experiences. We have times when it is difficult to engage our students due to various activities in their lives, however this does not mean that they are always this way. Even though it may be more difficult for them than for others, all the young people we work with have goals and ambitions. They just require extra assistance to achieve them.

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